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Commonwealth's New Acquisition Expands Leyden Wildlife Management Area *State and Local Officials and Conservationists Gather to Celebrate Protection of 400 Acres*

LEYDEN - Conservation partners from the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game, Franklin Land Trust, Mass Audubon, the town of Leyden, and the Massachusetts Sportsmen's Council today celebrated the protection of 400 acres in Franklin County that more than doubles the size of the Division of Fisheries & Wildlife's Leyden Wildlife Management Area (WMA).

"I would like to thank our partners from the Franklin Land Trust, Mass Audubon, and the Herron family for working with us on this conservation project," Department of Fish and Game (DFG) Commissioner Mary Griffin said. "I am also very happy to report that the Patrick Administration recently announced its commitment of at least \$50 million annually for the next five years to state open space protection programs so that we can continue to expand our land conservation efforts."

The Leyden Wildlife Management Area now comprises 775 acres of woodlands, fields, and small streams, and provides scenic overlooks of surrounding mountainous areas. The new property announced today includes the summit of Ball Mountain and protects East Glen Brook. Adjacent to other conservation land, including property owned by the town of Greenfield for water supply protection, the Commonwealth's newest land acquisition is part of more than 2,000 acres of protected open space – increasing its importance for water supply protection, recreation, and wildlife. The Leyden WMA provides excellent habitat for white-tailed deer, black bear, raccoon, wild turkeys, woodcock and numerous non-game species. The area is stocked with ring-necked pheasant and is popular for pheasant hunting in season.

Mass Audubon and the Franklin Land Trust initiated negotiations with three brothers – John, William and Sidney Herron - regarding protection of their family's farm and associated woodlands, and Mass Audubon ultimately procured options to purchase the property and other acreage in the area from the family.

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Because the Herron property is adjacent to the Leyden WMA and has excellent habitat value, the DFG agreed to purchase the 400 acres for \$825,000. The Franklin Land Trust also purchased a conservation restriction on 75 acres of nearby woodland and an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) on 166 acres of farmland owned by the Herrons. The APR will eventually be transferred to the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources.

“This was a great partnership,” noted Charlie Wyman, Land Protection Specialist for Mass Audubon. “We are grateful to the Herron family for their patience while we put together a conservation solution for their property, and we’re thrilled at the outcome. No one wanted houses sprouting on these fields and ridges. The result is a magnificent 400-acre property that will remain forever undeveloped and open for all to enjoy.”

“The Herron farm is one of the most beautiful and visible properties in Franklin County. We are extremely pleased to have been a partner in its protection,” said Rich Hubbard, Executive Director of the Franklin Land Trust.

“This is a beautiful property that provides habitat for a wide variety of native wildlife and great recreational opportunities for people who enjoy hiking, hunting, and wildlife observation,” said Division of Fisheries & Wildlife Director Wayne MacCallum.

The DFG spent \$7.6 million to protect more than 4,000 acres statewide in fiscal year 2007. The department has about \$10 million to spend on land acquisition in the current fiscal year. DFG’s Division of Fisheries and Wildlife manages more than 164,000 acres in the Commonwealth, including 21,600 acres in the Connecticut Valley Wildlife District. Since 2001, the agency has protected more than 7,500 acres in the Connecticut Valley District.

“Land protection is a priority of mine and it is wonderful to see that the Commonwealth’s environmental agencies are working with local partners in protecting open space, which is greatly appreciated by the people of Leyden and throughout my district,” said state Senator Stanley Rosenberg.

“I am happy to see that this area will be protected and open to people who enjoy the outdoors,” said state Representative Denis Guyer. “I would also like to thank the Herron family for agreeing to work with all the partners for the conservation of their land.”

The DFG and its Division of Fisheries & Wildlife’s land conservation program targets the most ecologically valuable habitats in Massachusetts. The agency utilizes state open space bond funds and revenue from the Wildlands stamp for land purchases. The Wildlands stamp is funded by a \$5 charge on the sale of fishing, hunting, and sporting licenses sold in Massachusetts. This sportsmen-funded initiative provides about \$1.3 million each year for the protection of open space. Since 1990, the Wildlands fund has provided \$22.3 million and resulted in the acquisition and permanent protection of 25,600 acres in the Commonwealth. For more information on the Commonwealth’s land conservation efforts, visit

http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/habitat/land/land_acquisitions.htm.

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